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ARTICLE IX.

BRIEF NOTES

ON THE

TAMIL LANGUAGE.

BY

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(Read May 19, 1852.)

BRIEF NOTES

ON THE

TAMIL LANGUAGE.

Its general character.

THE Tamil has two dialects or branches, commonly called the *High* and the *Low* Tamil. The native appellations for the two branches of the language, are *Shen-Tamiḷ* and *Koḍun Tamiḷ*.

Shen-Tamiḷ, the polished, correct Tamil, has three subdivisions, viz: 1. *Iyal-Tamiḷ*, Natural or Proper Tamil. This is a high and difficult prose style, which is employed chiefly in *Ureis*, or concise explanations of poetic stanzas. It is more closely allied to poetry, than to the common colloquial language. 2. *Isei-Tamiḷ*, Musical or Poetic Tamil. This is none other than *Iyal-Tamiḷ* arranged according to poetic rule. 3. *Nāḍaka-Tamiḷ*, Dramatic Tamil. This, again, is *Iyal-Tamiḷ*, as employed in the low style of poetry found in the common dramas.

No language can be more concise, copious, pliant, or mellifluous, than the *Shen-Tamiḷ*. It is the language of scholars, in all their books.

Koḍun-Tamiḷ, harsh, unpolished Tamil, is the common colloquial dialect. It does not deserve such an appellation. When well spoken or written, it is smooth and agreeable, except to the fastidious ear of the Tamil poet. Though it is not so flexible as the *Shen-Tamiḷ*, yet there is no definite idea which cannot be conveyed by it with precision, force, and beauty. It is a copious, flowing and refined language.

The two dialects are so unlike, and the *High* is in itself so difficult, that one who has not studied the *High*, however familiar with the *Low*, cannot understand the finished poetic style at all, not even a line in a page.

Its geographical extent.

The Tamil is spoken by about eight millions of people, in Ceylon and on the adjacent continent. It is believed to be the radix of the Telugû, the Canarese, the Malayâlim, the Tuluva, and other dialects, which constitute the speech of some twenty or thirty millions of people. So that it may well be considered as occupying Southern India. It is denominated, by the Tamîlars, the "Southern speech," by way of distinction from the Sanskrit, which they call the "Northern speech."

Its history and relations.

There is reason to believe, that India was originally settled by two branches from the family of Shem. One branch came in at the North-West, across the Indus; the other, at the South-West, by sea.

The language of the latter branch of this Indo-Shemitic family was the Tamil. This may be shown in several ways.

The Muni Agastya is claimed by the Tamîlars, to be the father of their purer, or High dialect. He prescribed its grammatical rules, and polished the language. This Agastya is said to have resided on the hill Pothiya, which belonged to the Pândion kingdom. It was not the Pothiya of the North, another name for Thibet. It is stated in the Râmâyana, that Râma, the hero of that earliest of the Hindû epics, on his first visit to the South, found Agastya in that region, at the head of a company of Rishis, or Munis. This would seem to establish the existence of the Tamil, as the language of the South of India, as early, at least, as 1200 B. C. It had then already received its distinctive poetic character which marks the High dialect. As the language of the masses, it must, therefore, have existed much earlier.

Some of the best authorities among the natives of Southern India, admit that the father of their pure Tamil dialect was from the North of India, where the Tamil was the native language, and where he learned the Sanskrit. This accords with recently developed facts respecting the relation of the Tamil to the aboriginal tribes of Northern India, which go, with augmenting force, to indicate that the *Tamil was the aboriginal language of all India*. The dominion of the Sanskrit over this earlier language, has been like the

conquests of the Hindûs, whose proper language it was, over the earlier tribes, extending gradually from the North-West, and being nearly complete in the fields of its first conquests; but less so, at the South.

Again, this position is confirmed by a reference to the Bible. The five articles mentioned in 1 Kings x. 22, were all to be obtained in Ceylon and Southern India, and, it is believed, collectively in no other place. In that passage, the word rendered peacock, *tōkei*, is a *pure Tamil word*, a primitive triliteral, dissyllabic term. It is not found in Sanskrit, nor in any other Indian language not allied to the Tamil. Some lexicographers have considered this to be radically the same as the Sanskrit *çikhî*. But this word has been adopted into the Tamil, in the form of *siki*. Every Tamil scholar knows that *siki* and *tōkei* are radically distinct. The term *kapi*, rendered ape, but more properly meaning monkey, is just as it stands in Tamil. This is found also in the Sanskrit. But we know that the Sanskrit was introduced into Southern India before Solomon's time; and therefore this word may be regarded as transferred from the Tamil to the Hebrew, especially as it is found in such close connection with the pure Tamil word above named. The same may be said of the word rendered *ivory*, in the passage referred to, literally *tooth of elephants*. The part meaning elephant (Sans. *ibha*, Tam. *ibam*), is found in Tamil, as well as in Sanskrit. These considerations seem to indicate very clearly whence the Tarshishan fleet of Solomon brought those articles, and, also, to determine the language of the people from whom they were obtained.

There are other considerations which go to show that the Tamil was the language of the first settlers of Southern India. The earliest names of places, things, etc. of the South, are pure Tamil, having no connection with the Sanskrit. These have been, in many cases, displaced by terms from the language of the dominant religion, Brâhmanism. Such is the case with regard to Madura, Râmnad, Râma's bridge, Travancore, which were formerly called, respectively, *Âlavây*, *Mukavei*, *Kallanei*, *Maleiyâlam*. The name of Tinnevely, a country where the *Shânars* abound, who are undoubtedly a portion of the aboriginal race, is pure Tamil, *Tirunelvēli*. The original term for Point Calimere is Tamil, *Kōdikarei*.

These remarks intimate, what it is believed will be found to be the fact, that the *Tamiḷ* belongs to the *Shemitic family of languages*. If so, it presents a new and interesting variety; and one, it is thought, well deserving the attention of the philologist and the ethnologist.

The roots, which are mostly verbal, are generally *trilitteral* and *dissyllabic*. A few words are composed of but two letters; and few have more than two syllables.

Some Tamiḷ words are so similar to Hebrew as at once to indicate their common origin. The following are given as examples of this similarity in vocables, being about one in every ten compared. Many more doubtless exist.

Tamiḷ.	Hebrew.
<i>Bâri</i> , to produce, to form.	בָּרָא, to create.
<i>Ara</i> , to reap, by plucking off, etc.	אָרָה, to reap, to pluck.
<i>Ēra</i> , to ascend, to increase.	אָרַם, to be high.
<i>Ari</i> , lion.	אָרִי, lion.
<i>Ari</i> , light, heat.	אָוֶר, light, heat.
<i>Aran</i> , or <i>Adan</i> , Lord.	אֲדָנִי, Lord.
<i>Ēṭekar</i> , minor gods.	אֱלֹהִים, gods.
<i>Batti</i> , house.	בַּיִת, house.
<i>Ūr</i> , town.	עִיר, or עָר, town.
<i>Banna</i> , to make.	בָּנָה, to build.
<i>Mâyvu</i> , death.	מָוֶה, death.

The Tamiḷars use *athu*, that, as indicative of the supreme, eternal God; it is one of their most expressive appellations for the undeveloped or unorganized Deity. This suggests the remark of Lowth, that “the Hebrew word *הוא*, he, is often equivalent to the true and eternal God. See De. xxxii. 39; Is. xliii. 10, 13, xlviii. 12; and, especially, Ps. cii. 27.”

Its grammatical characteristics.

The Tamiḷ verb has three tenses: present, past, and future. It undergoes changes to indicate the three persons, two numbers, and three genders. The person, number and gender are expressed by pronominal terminations in the verb. The gender is marked only in the third person singular, and in the neuter plural.

For example, the pronoun, or nominative, being understood :

Nadakkirēn, I walk.
Nadakkirāy, or *nadakkirīr*, thou walkest.
Nadakkirān, he walks.
Nadakkirāl, she walks.
Nadakkindathu, it walks.
Nadakkirōm, we walk.
Nadakkirīr, or *nadakkirīrkāl*, ye walk.
Nadakkirārkāl, they walk.
Nadakkindana, things walk.

The terminations are the same in all the tenses; except the neuter future, which ends in *um*, thus :

Nadakkerēn, I walk.
Nadantēn, I walked.
Nadappēn, I will walk.
Nadakkum, it will walk, etc.

The Tamil verb has five modes, viz: indicative, imperative, infinitive, optative, and subjunctive. The last three are formed directly from the indicative, but in various ways. The more common form of the optative is made by adding, to the personal terminations of the future, the particle *āka*, which is, in fact, the infinitive of the verb *to be*, *to become*, thus :

Nadappēnāka, may I walk, or let me walk.
Nadappīraka, mayest thou walk, etc.
Nadappīrkālāka, may they walk, etc.

The imperative has several forms; but the more proper form of the singular is that of the root. The plural is made by adding to the singular the plural pronominal termination, thus :

Nada, walk (thou).
Nodavungkal, walk (ye).

The *v*, inserted between the root and the plural termination, is a mere connective, used to prevent the hiatus which would otherwise occur by the two vowels coming together. After certain vowels, *y* performs this office, as will be seen in some of the examples given.

There is *no relative pronoun* in this language. Its place is supplied by a peculiarity in the participle, which is styled,

on this account, relative participle. Every participle includes a relative, or what is equivalent to a relative pronoun, which refers to the noun immediately following as its antecedent. This relative participle must be rendered, in English, by a finite verb and pronoun. For example: *nadakkira manushan* (where the first word is the present participle of the verb *to walk*, and the other the term for *man*), the man who walks or is walking. The Tamil here is as clear and definite as the English.

Every verb has *several negative forms*, variously made. One mode of forming the negative verb, is by adding the pronominal terminations *ēn, āy, an* or *ān, aḷ* or *āl*, etc., to the root of the verb. Thus, from the root *naḍa*, walk :

Naḍavēn, I will not walk.

Naḍavāy, thou wilt not walk.

Naḍavān, he will not walk, etc.

Another mode of forming the negative verb, is to add the particle *illei*, no, not, to the infinitive. Thus: from *nadakka*, to walk, we have *nadakkavillei*, does, do, or did not walk. This is used for all persons, and both numbers, without variation.

These two forms have but one tense. The former refers chiefly to future time, and the latter, to past time. But either may be used without reference to any specific time.

A negative verb is formed in the several tenses, by adding to the negative gerund of any verb, the substantive verb *irukkirathu*, to be, etc. This verb is regularly declined, the negative gerund undergoing no change. Thus, with the negative gerund *naḍavāthu*, or *naḍavāmal*, not walking :

Naḍavāthirukkirēn, I do not walk.

Naḍavāthiruntēn, I did not walk.

Naḍavāthiruppēn, I will not walk, etc. etc. etc.

These are all used in coramon Tamil. Other forms are employed in the High dialect.

All verbs have a *causative form*, made from the future indicative. This causative is always a perfect verb, regular in its conjugation. Thus, from *naḍappēn*, I will walk, etc., we have :

Naḍappikkirēn, I cause to walk.

Naḍappikkirāy, thou causest to walk.

Naḍappikkirān, he causes to walk, etc. etc. etc.

There is another causative form which some verbs admit, thus: *naḍattukirēn*, I cause (any business-matter) to walk, to advance. From *sumakkirēn*, I bear (a burden, etc.), we have *sumattukirēn*, I cause (a burden) to be borne. This, also, runs through the persons, tenses, etc. as a perfect verb.

By means of this last form, intransitive verbs become transitive, thus: *varukirēn*, I come; *varuttukirēn*, I cause to come.

Symbolic verbs are a peculiarity in Tamil. Appellatives which are declined like common nouns, abound in the language. Symbolic verbs are different, having the form and regimen of both verbs and nouns. These are employed mostly in High Tamil. They are usually formed from certain roots, or primitive nouns, which are used chiefly as adjectives. Yet they may be formed from any noun. I give a few examples.

From *adi*, meaning step, foot, root, servitude, we have *aḍiyēn*, I your servant. From *uḍei*, possession, we have *uḍeiyēn*, I the possessor. These are used in the different persons, numbers and genders.

The same word may have both a subject and an object, like any verb, and at the same time be governed, in the sentence, like a common noun. For example: *kōḍiyēi siri-yēnei aḍittāy*, thou who art a cruel man hast beaten me who am a small man. The compound subject in this sentence is expressed by the first word in the example, *kōḍiyēi*; and the compound object is contained in the second word of the example, *siriyēnei*, which is the proper form of the objective case. The last word, *aḍittāy*, is a common verb, in the past tense.

I will mention one other peculiarity of the Tamil verb, called, variously, the *gerund*, *verbal participle*, *first indefinite mode*. This is used in a compound sentence, instead of the finite form, in the case of all verbs in the sentence except the last. In the sentence: "Let us go to-morrow, reap the paddy, bring it to the threshing-floor, make a heap of it, thresh it, sell the rice, and pay the taxes," there would be six gerunds, and one verb only, the last, in the finite form. It would be exceedingly awkward and heavy to give these gerunds in the form of finite verbs. The tense, number, person, etc., of the gerunds, are always the same as the last verb, in the finite form, on which they all depend.

Articles.

The Tamil has *no articles*. The place of the definite article is supplied by the demonstrative pronouns, or by certain modes of expression. For the indefinite, is often used the numeral *oru*, one.

Declensions.

Nouns have *eight cases*, and all nouns, with very few exceptions, have the *same case-terminations*. The order and meaning of the cases may be given thus: He, him, by or with him, to him, from him, of him, or his, at or in him, and the vocative.

Pronouns.

Personal pronouns, as well as some nouns, have *two forms of plural*, both of which are sometimes used as *honorifics*, designed to mark superiority in the person to whom they are addressed. Verbs used with such nominatives change their terminations accordingly. For example:

<i>Nân</i> , I;	<i>nâm</i> , and <i>nângkal</i> , we, or (by way of honor), I.
<i>Nî</i> , thou;	<i>nîr</i> , and <i>nîngkal</i> , ye, or, " thou.
<i>Avan</i> , he;	{ <i>avar</i> , and <i>avarkal</i> , they, or { (by way of honor) he.
<i>Aval</i> , she;	

The two forms of the first person plural, *nâm* and *nângkal*, differ also in extension. *Nâm* includes both speaker and hearers; as in the sentence: "we (*nâm*) are all sinners." *Nângkal* excludes those spoken to, and is the proper correlative of *nîngkal*, ye.

In addresses to the Deity, it is very common to use, in the place of thou, *ḍēvarîr*, meaning, literally, ye gods, or ye who are gods. It is the word *Dēva*, God, with a double plural, in the form of the second person plural. The termination *îr* marks the second person plural in both pronouns and verbs.

So, also, the common word for Lord, *Swâmy*, in addresses to the Deity, usually takes the form of the *pluralis excellentiae*, *Swâmyâr*. *Âr* is the termination of verbs in the first form of the third person plural, and, when attached to nouns, it gives them the character of symbolic verbs, which are used as honorific appellatives.

Collocation of words in a sentence.

The governing particles are more properly *postpositions*, than prepositions, as they always follow the noun which they govern.

The sixth, or possessive, case always precedes the word by which it is governed.

In the case of active transitive verbs, both the subject and object usually precede the verb; thus: *nân avaneî aḍit-tēn*, I him beat.

The common order of the parts of speech in a sentence, is very nearly the reverse of what is common in English. Thus, the sentence: "the man who came here yesterday," would be in Tamil order: "yesterday here who came the man."

Adjectives.

Adjectives precede the nouns which they qualify, and admit no variation of form to express either gender, number, or case.

They admit of no change of form to express the degrees of comparison. The comparative degree is expressed by means of the dative, or ablative case of the noun, which in English would naturally follow *than*, but which, in Tamil, precedes the superior or qualified member of the sentence. Thus, "this is better than that" would be in Tamil order: "to that, this is good."

The comparison is sometimes made by the help of the verb *to look*, the same order of the words being observed, thus: *athei pârkkā, ithu nallathu*, to look at that, or, while we look at that, this is good.

The superlative degree is expressed by the help of the term for *all*, and the ablative case in the first member of the sentence as before. Thus, the expression: "God is most high," would be: "of, or among, all persons, God is high."

For "this is the best," we have: "of, or among, all things, this is good."

Other characteristic points in this language might be specified. But these are deemed sufficient to answer the purpose of this paper, which is, to call the attention of scholars to the Tamil as a rich and important language, and to enable them to determine its place in the classification of languages.